

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-0369
JOHN BUE/PARIS

MARCH 16, 1976

FRENCH ELECTION AND COMMUNIST PRESSURES

ANNCR:

IN FRANCE THIS PAST WEEKEND THE FRENCH LEFTIST OPPOSITION MADE STRONG POLITICAL GAINS IN REGIONAL ELECTIONS FOR HALF OF THE COUNTRY'S DISTRICTS. FROM PARIS, VOA'S JOHN BUE HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE:

THE IMPRESSIVE SHOWING OF THE PARTIES OF THE LEFT IN THE FRENCH DISTRICT ELECTIONS ADDS ANOTHER DIMENSION TO THE DEBATE HERE ON THE PARTICIPATION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN A FRENCH GOVERNMENT. STILL, MUCH OF THE FOCUS IS ON GENERAL ELECTIONS TO BE HELD IN TWO YEAR TIME. THE DISTRICT ELECTIONS ARE NOT A VALID MODEL FOR WHAT WILL HAPPEN THEN. NONETHELESS, OBSERVERS, EVEN THOSE OF THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY, AGREE THAT THEY REFLECT A TREND TOWARD THE LEFT. PSYCHOLOGICALLY, THEREFORE, THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IF THE COMMUNIST-SOCIALIST ALLIANCE CAME TO POWER IN FRANCE LOOM A LITTLE LARGER THAN PREVIOUSLY.

THE FACT IS THAT THE SOCIALISTS CAN NOW CLAIM, ON THE BASIS OF THE PUBLIC OPINION DATA THE ELECTIONS PROVIDED, THAT THEY ARE THE MOST POPULAR SINGLE PARTY IN THE COUNTRY. THE COMMUNISTS CAN ALSO CLAIM MODEST ADVANCES IN POPULARITY, PROBABLY DUE, ACCORDING TO ANALYSTS, TO THEIR RECENT STAND CRITICISING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION AND SHELIVING THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT ISSUE.

BUT SEVERAL SENIOR COMMENTATORS ARE NOT OVER-IMPRESSED BY THESE MOVES. POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR ALFRED GROSSER

WROTE RECENTLY IN THE PARIS DAILY "LE MONDE" THAT FRENCH AND ITALIAN COMMUNIST LEADERS ARE LUCKY THAT THE UNITED STATES MILITARY POWER REMAINS AS A DETERRENT, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD RAPIDLY EXPERIENCE THE FATE OF SPRING MOVEMENT LEADERS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

ANOTHER POLITICAL SCIENTIST AND REGULAR PRESS COMMENTATOR, JEAN-FRANCOIS REVEL, RECENTLY WROTE A BOOK IN WHICH HE SAYS FRENCH SOCIALISTS ARE COMMITTING SUICIDE BY COOPERATING WITH THE COMMUNISTS. IN AN EDITORIAL IN THE FRENCH WEEKLY L'EXPRESS, HE HIGHLIGHTS THE SLOWNESS WITH WHICH THE FRENCH COMMUNISTS FINALLY CAME AROUND TO ADOPTING A MORE INDEPENDENT STANCE TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. HE FEELS THAT WITH THEIR INSISTENCE UPON MORE NATIONALIZATIONS AND THEIR ATTACKS AGAINST PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING FOR HIS ALLEGED SUBSERVIENCE TOWARD "ATLANTICISM," THEY HAVE ONLY MOVED A SHORT DISTANCE DOWN THE ROAD ALREADY MORE THAN HALF COVERED BY THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS.

FOR THE PAST QUARTER CENTURY THE FRENCH POLITICAL BODY HAS FOLLOWED MISTER REVEL'S ADVICE AND KEPT THE COMMUNIST OUT OF GOVERNMENT. THEIR ELECTORAL ALLIANCE WITH THE SOCIALIST HAS PAID DIVIDENDS, BUT WITH THE SOCIALISTS AS THE MAIN BENEFICIARIES. SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS HAVE BEEN TORN BY IDEOLOGICAL AND TACTICAL DIFFERENCES, AS HAS BECOME EVIDENT AGAIN IN THE COURSE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THE RECENT COMMUNIST MOVES HAVE TONED DOWN THEIR CONTROVERSY ON INDIVIDUAL AND POLITICAL FREEDOMS.

BUT IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE TWO YEARS BETWEEN NOW AND GENERAL ELECTIONS IS LONG ENOUGH FOR THEM TO PERSUADE THE FRENCH ELECTORATE THAT ONCE IN POWER, THEY ARE REALLY

READY TO WORK FOR REFORMS WITHOUT TAKING FRANCE FOR WHAT
MANY CONSIDER AS A DANGEROUS SLIDE TOWARD THE SOVIET
ORBIT.

JS/PY